

## GEORGE MOFFETT EXIT INTERVIEW

This is an interview with George Moffett on December 5, 1980, 11:15 AM, in room 428 of the Old Executive Office Building. The interviewer is David Alsobrook of the Presidential Papers Staff.

**ALSOBROOK:** George, could you tell me a little about the type of work you were doing, perhaps in regard to Panama, before you came to work in the White House?

**MOFFETT:** I actually became, in December of 1977, research director for a small, but politically very well connected citizens committee. It was under the bipartisan jurisdiction of Averell Harriman and Hugh Scott. [It] took on a good bit of the public relations side of the Panama selling effort--a lot of things that, legally, the White House could not do. And being a small operation, the diversity of tasks meant that each of us did a range of things. And for me, it was a great opportunity. I initially started out writing speeches and op-ed pieces, and doing extensive research on the economic ramifications of the treaty, and some of the legal implications--separation of powers questions, and the sovereignty question as related to the canal zone, and jurisdiction of the 1903 treaty and so forth.

Eventually, I branched out into more overtly political things towards the end, while I was dispatched out to the field to shore up a few fleeting votes between the first and second treaties. Particularly in Arizona with Dennis DeConcini, and in Montana with Paul Hatfield. And I think, the latter of those two was probably quite helpful. We found that the task in Panama, as it later became in SALT--in the face of rather consistent general public opposition to the treaties, was to somehow try to legitimize a vote in favor of ratification. And that is precisely what I attempted to do both in Arizona and in Montana and what we collectively tried to do in all of the activities that we undertook at the committee and that were undertaken by some of the other private sector groups. And there were activities undertaken here at the White House as well by associating a vote for ratification with the broadest possible cross-section of responsible and respected public opinion.

When I went to Montana, for example, I only had about ten days, but in that time I was able, with the help of some people on the ground, to identify people--religious leaders, acadeems, business leaders, people in the scientific community--all across the state--political leaders whose names were well known to people living in Montana. And we simply took out an ad in all the leading newspapers in the state, in fact, virtually every newspaper in the state. The Sunday prior to the second and final Panama vote was a collective endorsement by about a hundred and fifty different people in a state that size. And I think that counts. And I think that Paul Hatfield felt that made it easier to vote for the treaties even though there was heavy public opposition within Montana to the ratification effort. So that was the gist of what I did for the four or five months that I was employed as research director for, as it was called, the Committee of Americans for the Canal Treaties.

**ALSOBROOK:** Was there any kind of informal connection with the White House during this period?

**MOFFETT:** Yes. There was a lot of connection in the sense that people who managed the operation at COACT kept in pretty close touch, primarily through Hamilton's [Jordan] office, through Landon Butler and Laurie Lucey who are here. My association with them, personally, came somewhat late in the game. But two or three of the people who managed the committee staff were in regular contact by phone, and towards the end there were almost daily meetings that took place with the White House staff and the COACT staff and some other people in the private sector who were active in the ratification effort.

**ALSOBROOK:** So you were well organized. It sounds like a very well organized...

**MOFFETT:** Yes. I think by and large it was a pretty well organized event. The problem on Panama, and we found this somewhat on SALT, is that we--by the time we got in full swing, particularly with the effort to explain the treaties publicly, divorcing, for a moment, the congressional effort to sell the treaties, we were a little bit behind the eight ball because our friends on the other side of the aisle had been active long before we were and had already begun to plant some seeds of doubt, I think, in the public mind as to the validity of those treaties. So, it was always a matter of trying to regain ground.

From the very beginning, the public polls registered, I don't recall the numbers off the top of my head, but well over fifty percent general public opposition to the treaties. And we were always fighting against that. We were always working with the limitation that never really changed--that people didn't come around in their thinking on the treaties until they were sufficiently informed to know that the treaties didn't disserve America's long-term or short-term national security interests. When we had the chance to speak to people and they had the chance to understand what the treaty really provided for, we found that, in most cases, they became sympathetic to what we were trying to do. But, the totality of the effort, I think, was well organized but just simply started a little bit late.

**ALSOBROOK:** And your opponents were well organized, too, by then.

**MOFFETT:** [They were] well organized and far better funded than we were.

**ALSOBROOK:** Who were they? Who were these opponents that you thought--

**MOFFETT:** Well, there was a coalition of interests on the political right among the conservative caucus. And there were two rubric coalitions; one was the Emergency Coalition to save the Panama Canal, I think I have these titles right, and then another, the Committee to Save the Panama Canal. People like Howard Phillips. A number of key Congressmen and Senators: Orrin Hatch, Jake Garn, Strom Thurmond, and so

forth, led the opposition from the right. Ronald Reagan, who had an operation called, I believe, the Fund for the Republic, was one of the leading articulators of dissident views on the Panama treaties, and together they were very effective. A huge mass mailing operation orchestrated by Richard Viguerie, whose operation out in McLean, Virginia, has netted millions and millions of dollars in right wing causes, and I think the issue was largely perceived on the political right as the kind of thing that would be a magnet for drawing together the diverse forces of the political right into a unified front. E And, in fact, they did very well at it measured in terms of how close they came to defeating ratification and certainly measured in terms of the reach of their effort--literally millions of letters. [And] certainly measured in terms of the amount of money they were able to raise to fund the effort, primarily, from tens of thousands of small contributors who felt that the Panama Canal Treaties were inimical to American interests. And who I think, by my own lights, incorrectly, felt that somehow the effort to come to some equitable understanding with the Panamanians over the disposition of the Canal was inconsistent with America's past diplomatic experience.

**ALSOBROOK:** So where did most of your support come from?

**MOFFETT:** Well, interestingly, a good deal of our support came from the business sector. A lot of Fortune 500 size corporations, especially a number of them associated with the Council of the Americas, major Fortune 500 corporations which had active and regular trading interests in Latin America. I think they rightly perceived that if the treaties were not ratified then, the environment for trading in Latin America would be poisoned.

I think, on the far right, there might have been some effort, in fact, there was, especially with Sol Linowitz and his connection with the Marine Midland Bank, to paint a conspiratorial picture here that it was the corporations bankrolling the effort to ratify the treaty because they had selfish interests at stake.

I think that greatly oversimplifies it. If the business community had been the only source of support, I might have been inclined to think that there was some substance to those fears. By and large, I think the Panama Canal Treaties were ratified not only because it had that segment of support but was the object of broad bipartisan support among some very leading Republicans, and by all sorts of people who comprised what we euphemistically speak of as the establishment foreign policy community. I'm talking about some very respected figures like, on the Republican side, certainly like Howard Baker. Without his support, clearly the treaty would not have been ratified. Henry Kissinger, Gerald Ford, a lot of people who were active in previous Republican administrations. The Counsel on Foreign Relations, I think, and the Foreign Policy Association, neither of which, as organizations, took positions, but, among whose members there was clearly overwhelming support for ratification. And I think as a result of having these kinds of people in the fold, you had, on a national level, what I just explained we had in Montana on a much more local level. The support for the treaty

was really legitimized by the fact that Henry Kissinger would say, publicly and often and with obvious conviction that, by his lights, our effort to come to some fair settlement of a long-standing grievance over the Panama Canal Treaty and over the Panama Canal was the very thing that would really secure our long term interests in the canal rather than jeopardize them. The evolution of events in Panama meant that in these latter years the real threat to the canal ceased to be some third party, but rather the Panamanians themselves who, at a point, may well have been driven in their extremity to, had we refused to relinquish the canal, take things into their own hands, [and] perhaps, be unable to restrain terrorist activities directed at the canal. And the way to forestall that threat was to renegotiate those treaties on a basis that provided s priority access and the rights to keep the canal operating and neutral even after the expiration of the treaty itself in the year 2000.

**ALSOBROOK:** I was really going to ask you a question, and I think you just answered it partially, but how do you think future generations of Americans and scholars will look upon this particular accomplishment of this administration?

**MOFFETT:** I have no doubt that, in the long light of history, there will scarcely be a dissenting voice that this effort to comprehend the aspirations of a critical third world nation really represents a significant turning point in American foreign policy. A whole new approach to the world that, because it's so realistic, as I said before, I think it's really protected our interests in a very significant way.

**ALSOBROOK:** But, you know, over the short-haul, it's almost like some of the conservative groups to the right have used this as another issue in this last campaign to--and it's still a very emotional issue, don't you think, the whole ratification issue?

**MOFFETT:** It is, as far as I can tell. The emotions may have persisted to the point that a couple of the Senate or Congressional races in 1980 may well have been affected by it, at least as one of several factors. Clearly, public feelings do continue to run high. I've seen no polls that were done since the ratification was completed by the Senate to indicate that, overall, public feelings have warmed up much to the Panama Canal Treaties. On the other hand, those feelings are completely out of sync with what's happened in the last year. The Panamanians are slowly but surely gaining control of the operation of the canal. The canal zone itself, which has been the exclusive American preserve in Panama since 1903, has ceased to exist as of a year ago, and, in fact, the canal is running well. Business has never been better. In fact, as I understand it, ships are waiting up to three and four days for the rights to transit the canal. The Panamanians clearly understand that the canal is their greatest natural resource, and they are not about to let the thing languish or fall into disuse, because without it they have lost a very significant source of revenue. So, self-interest alone dictates they will do well with it. And so long as that self-interest exists, our interests are protected.

**ALSOBROOK:** George, we need to get you into your White House job. Now, you came to work here in December of '78. Could you give me some of the background on how that job developed for you?

**MOFFETT:** Well, as a prefatory note here, I actually came to the White House in September, where I had a very brief respite during the time Robert Strauss was inflation counsel to the President and his deputy was Lee Kling. And Lee had been one of the day managers of the Panama operation. So, during the time that Lee was deputy to Bob Strauss, I lent some support to that operation by helping devise a strategy to explain the administration's anti-inflation efforts and devoted a good deal of my time in that capacity both to speechwriting and to setting up a couple of major conferences, one in St. Louis and one in Hartford that involved a number of Cabinet ranked people in highly visible ways. [I] tried to explain our approach to the anti-inflation problem. That was short because Strauss reverted to his position as Special Trade Negotiator and Fred Kahn came on as the principal architect of our anti-inflation efforts.

So at that point, just as Bob Strauss faded out of the inflation business, I was asked to join Hamilton Jordan's staff, and to do, at the outset, something very specific. Now, this was in December of 1978, and at that time Hamilton and Landon Butler, his deputy with whom I worked most closely, were giving some thought to some of the principal legislative initiatives that would be coming up in the new Congress in January. So, what I did, beginning in mid-December and lasting into the spring was essentially take on the responsibilities, and it wasn't called this, but essentially responsibilities of a secretariate to the senior staff. I probably took ten or fifteen major issues that were on the agenda beginning in January. Issues like national health insurance, real wage insurance, SALT, trucking deregulation, railroad deregulation, and I would do--working with Landon and working with people who had specific substantive responsibilities in each of those areas, would put together political working papers, four or five pages in length. They're in the files. And what they tried to do was to give each of the members of the senior staff a basic statement of the significance of the issue, what our position on the issue was, what our legislative calendar was going to be on those issues, committees that had jurisdiction on the Hill, sources of support and opposition on the Hill and publicly, the political significance of decisions that still needed to be made on those issues. And we put this together in four or five pages. And after being cleared by two or three people, we circulated them to the senior staff. And those documents would be used on a weekly basis or so as the basis for an entire senior staff meeting. I think the effect of it was to bring the senior staff up to speed on the basics of all of those.

**ALSOBROOK:** Was this back when Hamilton was chairing?

**MOFFETT:** This was back when Hamilton was chairing the senior staff meetings.

**ALSOBROOK:** So he would probably sign off on this or maybe Stu Eizenstat or

whoever happened to be dealing with that particular set of policies or whatever, right?

**MOFFETT:** Exactly. On an issue like trucking deregulation, there was obviously nothing in the paper, of that sort, that I would have done that would have been news to Stu Eizenstat. But that wasn't the purpose of it. What it did do was to bring the rest of the senior staff, as I say, up to speed on that issue. So, there were some common denominators that were laid out in those papers. On an issue, for example, that would fall within Stu's purview, he normally took the lead in those discussions. The papers, I think, just started to stimulate questions.

To give you an example of what they were able to do, to bring to the senior staff; one of the key issues that was on the legislative agenda beginning in January was the question of national health insurance. And among Democrats there has been some widely diverging views over whether or not to go with a comprehensive national health insurance program of which Senator Kennedy is one of the principal advocates, or a scaled down version of the comprehensive program that might include enrichment of Medicare and Medicaid and catastrophic coverage, but perhaps, at least at the outset, nothing more than that. One of the really fundamental questions that needed to be resolved in this administration before the legislative year began was whether we would be on record in favor of a full-blown comprehensive program or whether, in fact, we would go with the scaled-down version. This implied certain differences of opinion between the Domestic Policy Staff on the one hand and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare on the other. One of the things that particular paper did was to couch the arguments both ways so that the senior staff could discuss that issue at length. And eventually that issue was resolved at the very highest levels. But, I think that is illustrative of how the senior staff was brought up to speed on the fundamental issues that surrounded that particular issue. We got into foreign policy issues as well.

**ALSOBROOK:** Were you able to participate in some of those meetings or at least sit in on almost all of them?

**MOFFETT:** I sat in on virtually all of them. [I] took minutes which are preserved in the records somewhere. Only rarely was I an actual participant in the sense of volunteering comments, but I did attend the senior staff meetings regularly at that point.

**ALSOBROOK:** You did this sort of work for how long? What was the time span?

**MOFFETT:** That was from December until spring. That faded out, I think, in March or April. It faded out in part because we had--in preparing the issue papers we had really covered most of the main legislative issues that were coming up in the new Congress. And in part because the SALT Treaty was moved from the back to the front burner, and that was to implicate my future months at the White House.

**ALSOBROOK:** I assume that you moved right into SALT.

**MOFFETT:** I did.

**ALSOBROOK:** So would you tell me a little bit about that?

**MOFFETT:** In the spring, the President asked Hamilton to take over responsibilities for orchestrating a whole strategy to get the SALT II Treaty ratified. At that point, the treaty was not quite complete. It would be summer before it was. Eventually, the negotiations were completed and the Treaty was signed in Vienna by President Carter and President Brezhnev. But we were looking ahead to that time, and consistent with what we had learned with the Panama Canal ratification effort, the decision was made to go ahead and lay the groundwork for the ratification effort at that early stage. So, the first thing that happened was that at Hamilton's request, Landon, and I supported him pretty closely on this, was asked to draft for the President a whole comprehensive ratification program. And Landon and I worked at some length on this and prepared a document that ran seven or eight or nine pages in which we anticipated, phase by phase, what the requirements of the ratification effort would be. During the initial stages which we ran in the spring, what new requirements would be imposed on the ratification effort at the time of the announcement, what the basic outlines of the Congressional and public outreach strategy would be, how we would be able to press the media, how we would try to elicit the support of prominent former government officials, for example. So, we took a look at virtually every possible ramification of what we were about to get into, put it on paper, and it went in to the President and that became, essentially, the structure within which we tried to operate in the succeeding months. Obviously, there were a lot of changes as we went, but that provided the starting point. And with that document in hand, a steering committee of sorts was put together. And beginning, my dates are off here perhaps, but I think beginning in April or May we began meeting periodically in the Roosevelt Room. Hamilton and Landon, myself, several members of the Congressional Liaison staff, Frank Moore, Bob Beckel, who had primary responsibility for the SALT ratification effort, Bob's counterparts at the State Department, Warren Christopher, who was a regular attendant, George Seignious, some people on the arms control/disarmament agency staff, Walt Slocombe, and several other people from the Defense Department. We even had a couple of representatives from the CIA. So, it was a pretty good cross-section of people, all of whom have direct interest in one phase or another of this whole ratification effort.

**ALSOBROOK:** This was the so-called SALT Task Force?

**MOFFETT:** This was the so-called SALT Task Force.

**ALSOBROOK:** Chaired by Hamilton Jordan.

**MOFFETT:** Chaired by Hamilton Jordan, yes.

**ALSOBROOK:** Could you give me some more details about what the months ahead looked like?

**MOFFETT:** My particular responsibility here was to be at Hamilton's and Landon's behest--a kind of privileged interloper in the whole process in the sense that every time we had a meeting we would assign certain tasks, and because Hamilton's office chaired the operation we took it upon ourselves to try to keep the whole operation on a regular time-table, make sure that everything was done in consonance with the overall timetables that we had agreed upon collectively in those task force meetings. So, I did that. More specifically, as the summer went on, after the treaty was signed in Vienna, I came to have more active responsibilities working with Anne Wexler's staff. Then we signed in on the whole public outreach effort. To that end, [we] did a variety of things. We put together a series, again drawing on our Panama Canal experience, of briefings in the White House for a wide variety of people--special interest groups, armament, disarmament, groups in the private sector that had a specific interest in disarmament and arms control issues, religious groups, groups of leading national scientists. Thirty to sixty people from almost every state in the union were brought into the White House for three or four hour briefings that would normally include the President, and very often include either Secretary Brown or Secretary Vance or Dr. Brzezinski or some combination of those personnel together with other people who would explain the technique and the substance of the treaty. We called them state leadership conferences, and they drew on a pretty diverse cross-section of people from states. The names were called not only from our own files, but with the active support of the Senators in those states.

**ALSOBROOK:** So you worked very closely with Anne Wexler in terms of the names that some--did you use the computer name file and that sort of thing?

**MOFFETT:** Well, we used the computer name file. We actually built a name file in the process. For example, the first round of briefings we did were for--we essentially took the uppermost echelon of prominent Americans that we could put our hands on. We sat down, and it was a very time consuming operation which I had the principal hand in at that stage, identifying people--former government officials, prominent retired political people, business leaders and so forth. And we must have had three or four sessions with people at that rank before we became more specialized at bringing people in from individual states or bringing in representatives of very specific special interest groups. And our hope was, and this was the strategy both among prominent national leaders outside government as well as leaders in the Senate, to encourage them, at least at the outset if nothing else, to be open-minded on SALT and not to voice negative opinions on the treaty until the debate had actually taken place. Even if we couldn't expect support at the outset from a lot of those people, we said, "Think about the treaty. Let



the debate run its course. Be open-minded. And, at that point make up your mind. But don't prejudice the case in advance on the strength of incomplete information and declare opposition to the treaties right away." So, it was really an effort to forestall, perhaps, more than to actually encourage support at those early stages.

**ALSOBROOK:** That was a similar technique as was used in Panama, right?

**MOFFETT:** Absolutely. There are an awful lot of parallels here in the two efforts. On the public outreach side, in addition to doing these extensive lists of White House briefings, most of which were East Room size.

We worked closely with the State Department in encouraging State to develop plans for teams of people to go around the country to do editorial backgrounders for newspapers all over the country, which they did. And which I think probably had some impact on national press opinion on the SALT Treaty. We made arrangements through the media liaison office here, particularly through Pat Bario to bring into the White House leading syndicated columnists, editorial writers, editorial page editors, op-ed page editors to brief them, generally in smaller groups, on the terms of the SALT Treaty.

We made a major effort to compile exhaustive information on major conventions that were being held across the country at this time. And in virtually every case we offered to them a speaker on SALT, and probably, in the majority of cases, were able to place some administration spokesman who could speak on behalf of the SALT II Treaty.

In addition to all of this, there was a separate operation, I think they called it the SALT Working Group, over at the State Department that we worked with somewhat which was in the business of setting up a series of state leadership conferences that were kind of the reverse of what we were doing with these East Room briefings. We would bring the leading people from the state into Washington under the auspices of the White House. And what they did, in a sense, was take a whole operation out to the field and, on an invitation only basis, would have a day long session that would incorporate the opinion leaders from within that state. And, in a sense, they'd do the same kind of format that we would have. People from the administration and leading prominent pro-SALT spokesmen from outside the administration, people like Paul Warnke who was an advocate, a regular, terribly articulate supporter. There were others, Bill Colby, who did the same thing. So in concert to what we did using the premises of the White House or occasionally the State Department, we also had this complementary activity which took the SALT message out to the field in very elaborate and very well-organized conferences.

So, we had the speakers operation, the editorial boards, the columnist briefings, the effort to plug administration speakers into conventions. We made prominent presidential surrogates available to lead forums around the country, and by surrogates, in this case, I mean Secretary Vance, Dr. Brzezinski, and so forth, who, from time to

time, did take on major speaking dates.

**ALSOBROOK:** Mondale had something to say.

**MOFFETT:** Mondale did, extensively, including one four or five day swing. There were some key states in the South and Middle West and, actually, into the far West. And on this issue, as on most others, he was very articulate and very persuasive and, I think, won a lot of support for SALT.

**ALSOBROOK:** In terms of media liaison as well, I assume you also got involved in those mass mailing projects that they did, too, with SALT. Did you have to prepare a lot of those booklets or what-have-you?

**MOFFETT:** All of the literature that was done on SALT was prepared under the direct auspices of the State Department, either the public affairs office or in ACDA itself. What we did do was to take the principal documents prepared by the State Department that range from brief dictionaries of terms appropriate to the field of arms control to short, medium, and rather lengthy expositions on the merits of the treaties. We put them together in a looseleaf binder that we made available, primarily, to the Hill but also to some other interested parties outside of government. And we would continue to update this from time to time during the whole course of the ratification effort. And I think it was just one way of keeping in regular touch with the people who were of particular concern to us. There were mailings that went out, primarily under Anne Wexler's jurisdiction, and I think they can probably give you better details on that than I can.

**ALSOBROOK:** One item, George, in attempting this outreach program, because of the complexity of SALT terminology, the kinds of various types of warheads, that sort of thing. Did that present a major problem? Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

**MOFFETT:** It posed an extraordinary problem, because unlike the Panama Canal Treaties where the issue at stake was relatively simple to comprehend, I doubt that very many Americans ever really did understand any details at all with the terms and implications in the SALT debate. This kind of issue is clearly the preserve of those few who have the expertise and the background to evaluate very complex issues involving weapon systems and larger defense issues. I think one of the ramifications of that complexity was that very often the national debate tended to evolve into arguing pro and con and very specific pieces of the total question. For example, for a time the verification constantly grew very large in the thinking of people. Questions were always raised. "Why should we enter into negotiations with the Russians on something as critically important as nuclear weapons when, in fact, history has shown that we really cannot trust the Russians?" So, for a period of time we expended extensive amounts of time and energy trying to explain as best we could to the public that the treaty, in fact, was based not on trust but on rather elaborate and quite reliable verification methods

that were available and would be enhanced by the specific provisions of SALT.

When verification ceased to be an issue, other specific components of the treaty did; the question of heavy missile superiority that was granted in the treaties to the Russians, the questions of the backfire bomber. And I think overall, the effect was that somehow among all these component parts, very few Americans were ever able to gain any good sense of the totality of the treaty and what it did. And we quickly fell in the trap.

And I think, as I look back on it, one of the principal problems which I wish we could have avoided (I'm not sure whether we could have; ideally it would have been good), and that was falling into the trap of debating every one of these issues at such great detail that we ourselves, I think, lost our effectiveness in communicating to the American public the real essence of this treaty. After all, what we're talking about is preventing nuclear war, the unthinkable holocaust that would come from some premeditated or accidental use of nuclear weapons. Instead, the debate got tedious. It lost whatever inspiration it might have had otherwise. And I think this probably served the advantage of people who were trying to forestall the treaty.

Back during the Panama debate, we found that one of the difficulties we faced was that among people who were trying to forestall the progress of the treaty in the Senate, there was an effort, a similar effort, to focus public attention on very specific aspects. The economics of treaty ratification, for example. The alleged use of drugs by Omar Torrijos and his family. Very specific issues like that would tend to divert public attention from the main issue. I guess every treaty ratification effort runs into this kind of problem. The people that tried to block the Versailles Treaty did much the same thing. I think the results with respect to SALT were much more consequential because we never were able really to get beyond those backwater controversies over things like heavy missiles and the backfire bomber in a manner that enabled us to convey, with the kind of forcefulness and the kind of clarity that we needed to convey, that this issue was of paramount importance and in the long term really served American interests because it would keep the SALT process alive.

**ALSOBROOK:** You know, you were leading right into an area I wanted to ask you about next—

**MOFFETT:** Let me just make one post-scriptive comment. I think one other major consequence of the fact that a majority of Americans simply were incapable of understanding all the technicalities of this treaty was that it made the treaty especially vulnerable to all sorts of passing political winds. Obviously, the principal reason that this treaty was shelved was because of the Afghan invasion. But that was just the last of a number of major events including the revelation of Soviet troops in Cuba, for example, that cast public doubt on the value of the treaty, because the treaty was never really judged in the public mind on its merit. It was always judged in the context of events that seemed to influence or to raise questions about the desirability in timing of

arms control. And we could never quite get beyond that. And we really lost our momentum because issues like the question involving the presence of Soviet troops in Cuba assumed a disproportionate amount of influence over the course of the SALT debate in the Senate and in the public.

**ALSOBROOK:** And, also, I guess the Iranian events and the loss of our monitoring capabilities on the Iranian border. Is this another one of these things that you are referring to?

**MOFFETT:** Absolutely. And the net effect of it all, of course, is that the terms of debate just kept shifting constantly. We felt like we were obliged to shoot at a moving target. I think that hurt us. I think it hurt us badly. I think another thing that hurt us badly, and maybe this is a point that should be elaborated in a different context so I'll mention it just briefly here, is that I think there was a, rightly or wrongly, general public perception by the time we were involved in a ratification debate on SALT that the President's foreign policy lacked the resolve and the forcefulness necessary to deal with the Russians. I think so long as that perception existed it meant that the business of selling arms control was going to be especially difficult for this administration because it looked, in the minds of a lot of Americans in the wake of the Panama Canal Treaties and so forth, that here was just another example of the United States capitulating to hostile forces and not maintaining its strength. I think that's another factor that probably bore adversely on our ratification efforts.

**ALSOBROOK:** You know you're talking about all these shifting political winds and everything. Could you give me a little more detail about some of your opponents and the people who really caused you the most trouble during these various events and so on?

**MOFFETT:** Well, the alignment of the opposition, the nucleus of it, was much the same as it had been on Panama. Virtually all of the hardline groups on the political right were allied in their opposition to SALT and used all of the, to my mind, various arguments that cast doubt on the treaty and precisely the wrong terms.

The one thing that made SALT much more difficult for us than Panama, and the one thing that the opposing forces had at their command, which they simply did not have during the Panama ratification debate, was coincidence of interests with a lot of key leaders of national opinion who on Panama were with us, but who on SALT were against. It was almost impossible for us, during the course of the ratification debate on SALT, to muster the kind of raw bipartisan support that we knew at the outset we would need, and which happily we had during the Panama ratification debate. Even people like Henry Kissinger and Gerald Ford who themselves were architects of the major provisions of this treaty were--if they didn't reject the treaty outright, they were at least sufficiently cool in their comments that [they] tended to support the argument that was made by the political right; that the treaty was nothing more than a plaything of the

McGovern liberals. And we had a hard time overcoming that public perception.

The whole ratification debate became intimately involved in the question of defense expenditures. A lot of key Senate votes, I think, would have been decided by people like Sam Nunn, who always insisted that before a vote in favor of ratification could begin, he would have to be satisfied that the administration was really committed to long-term and rather major growth in defense spending. And in the case of Sam Nunn, in particular, the ante was increased to include very specific things like reinstatement of the draft and so forth. And because people like Henry Kissinger and Gerald Ford, other prominent Republicans, and some major conservative Democrats of the Jackson wing, so-called Democratic Party and people like Ben Wattenberg and so forth who were aligned with the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, because all of these people tended to fall in that general grouping of people who would not have been satisfied with SALT without clear demonstration from this administration that it was committed to long-term growth in defense spending.

We always found ourselves facing conditional responses from people who we had hoped would be our friends during the course of the ratification debate. People would say, "I will consider a vote for ratification or I will consider an endorsement for SALT, but I'm not going to endorse that treaty now, not until we see what the new budget figures are going to be." And, of course, we never really got to the point where we were able to have a vote on SALT measured against specific defense numbers because Afghanistan intervened before the budget process was complete.

**ALSOBROOK:** Yes, I was really going to ask you that. Was it Afghanistan that really shut down the whole SALT process?

**MOFFETT:** Quite clearly. People have been talking about the possible influence of Afghanistan for some months. The first break in momentum clearly came in the wake of revelations by Senator Church that two thousand Soviet troops were stationed in Cuba. I think the response to that revelation on the Hill, and it impressed into the White House for a brief time, bordered on hysterical. I think nobody kept their poise in the face of an issue which inherently was without significance--two thousand Soviet troops without sea or air capability, they're not about to go anywhere. But the presence of those troops had such an immense symbolic value, as much as the Panama Canal Treaties themselves did, that they threw the ratification effort off track. And I think we handled that badly. I think the Senate handled it badly. That clearly tapped the momentum.

I recall the night the President made his speech to the nation in the wake of that revelation. I was in Panama with the Vice-President during the ceremonies that marked the turning the canal over to the Panamanians and the official legal end to the canal zone as of October 1. It was in 1979. And I remember thinking in my hotel room in Panama having then labored for three or four months almost full-time on this treaty that it might be a blow from which we would never quite recover. Perhaps we would have if

that had been the only thing.

But on top of that other things came; Iran, and throughout the whole course of events here people kept saying, "Russian troops are mobilizing [on] the Afghan border. If they cross over, then we will not be able to avoid the question of linkage. We will no longer be able to say what the Russians do at any given theater of the world has no bearing on ratification of SALT. Politically, we each had to be brought into being once Afghanistan [inaudible].

**ALSOBROOK:** Now, Church had been briefed on the Cuban/Russian troops issue in Cuba in his committee, right? I mean by intelligence sources or whatever. So he really didn't have a legal right to make that information known. I mean, I assume that was classified information that he broke in his press conference.

**MOFFETT:** My understanding of the sequence of events that occurred, and I should condition this by saying this is just my understanding based on no particular inside information, is that when that information first became known to a small number of people within the administration, and through some leaks then became known to some people who were hostile both to SALT and who were generally considered opponents to the administration, the decision was made here that to forestall the worst effects of this, as long as the information would quickly become known publicly, that we should allow that information to be made public through somebody who we considered to be a friend of the administration who revealed that information publicly in some responsible fashion, and the decision was made.

And there was a certain logic to it, I think, to let Frank Church be that person since he was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. We were the victims of bad timing because Frank Church had just been home for two or three weeks back in his district campaigning for his Senate seat which he eventually lost. At that point he was behind in the statewide polls, behind Steve Symms by about twenty-five points, and was clearly running a bit scared of--I think, judging from what I know of the situation was surprised to find how hawkish his constituents had become, how strongly they had felt about the Senator's commitment to the Panama Canal Treaties. And I think he felt he was in a position where he had to make some pretty hardline rhetorical stands.

So right at that confluence of events, the general question of the Cuban troops, the Soviet troops in Cuba came up. And when Frank Church revealed that to the press, he did it in a manner which I think rather than allaying public fears, I think he exacerbated public fears. It provoked an immediate response from the press, and it evoked a response from the administration and on the Hill in general. Right away the feeling was, this is a serious problem ninety miles from our borders. When in fact I think somebody should have [had] the presence to stand up and say, "Let's not lose our heads. This is not such a significant event. We don't like it. We will make our feelings known to the Russians. But let's not confuse the presence of two thousand Soviet troops in Cuba

with the whole future of a process of arms control which has taken place over the course of the last decade."

**ALSOBROOK:** Do you have any comments about the role the media played during this experience?

**MOFFETT:** Well, as I said, I think the media performed no better than anybody else. I think they also got carried away and there were very few responsible voices in the media that were heard in the immediate aftermath of Senator Church's revelation.

**ALSOBROOK:** And, of course, after Afghanistan the SALT issue, even though the treaty had been shelved, still became a part of the campaign.

**MOFFETT:** Well, it's interesting because my own assessment, up until the last two or three months of the campaign, was that we would probably leave that alone as a campaign issue because it was not an issue that the public was clearly enamored with. I think the thing that brought it back on the campaign agenda were some of the statements made by Governor Reagan that placed him squarely in opposition not only to SALT but, by indirection, to the whole process of arms control. And I think a decision was made that the President, for good and right reasons, wanted to publicly and actively and as often as possible reassert his commitment to [the] process of arms control and use that issue as a point of distinction in the diverging foreign policies of Carter and Reagan. So quite by surprise and in response to nothing in particular but rather Governor Reagan's comments during the campaign, we decided to get back into the SALT selling business.

And those last two months were quite busy in that respect. We made a real effort to illicit expressions of support for the process of arms control. We made a real effort to make it very clear to the public, and I think the effort was appropriate. And I think it was fair that the result of Governor Reagan's expressed intention to judge us on SALT II would not just mean the end of SALT II itself, but would mean the end of the entire arms control process. We really made an effort to stay with our feeling that the chances of doing what Governor Reagan professed to want to do, namely to scrap SALT II in an effort to get a better SALT III Treaty, would probably not work out in practice. Because it was doubtful to us and it remains doubtful to me, and perhaps I will be proved wrong on this, that the Soviets would be willing to make the kind of concessions Governor Reagan, apparently, is expecting. Particularly, on the issues of backfire bomber and heavy missile superiority without, in turn, demanding the kind of concessions that I don't think Governor Reagan would be willing to make. I assume those concessions would be in the area of forward based systems which under the current treaty provisions are not counted as part of our overall force aggregates.

I think the gist of our argument during the campaign, and I have no regrets that we raised it, was that the consequence of scrapping SALT II would not be a better SALT III, but would be the end of the arms control process, and that the legacy of that decision by

Governor Reagan had very portentous consequences on the whole conduct of American foreign policy and the prospects for peace and the prospects for containing local theater conflicts and disagreements in which we would find ourselves, surely in the coming years, with the Soviets.

**ALSOBROOK:** Again, subjectively, do you feel like having to get back into the SALT Treaty business hurts you or helps you or whatever?

**MOFFETT:** I suppose on balance it was probably a negligible factor. I'm glad we did because I think it lent--I think, somewhat, it helped to compensate for the general bad feeling that grew from the rather negative campaign that the President chose to conduct in the waning months. I think by reasserting the SALT issue, by reasserting his strong moral and political commitment to the process of arms control, I think the President dignified himself. I think he placed himself squarely, for the record, on the right side of that issue [as] much as he has done in these waning days of his administration on certain aspects of civil rights, which are now up for discussion on the Hill. I think in the long register we'll judge him favorably for having done it. I have no regrets that we raised it.

**ALSOBROOK:** That was the next question I was going to ask you, but you took care of that. I don't have any more questions on SALT, but I know you were also involved in some other things that you wanted to get into a little bit if we had time.

**MOFFETT:** Well, there was a third phase of my activity here that, perhaps, ought to be mentioned because I think it has some bearing. I'm wondering maybe [if] it should be something that we talk about in the next session.

**ALSOBROOK:** Fine. We can come back and spend another hour on that if you'd like. You think that would be okay in another week or so?

**MOFFETT:** That would be fine.

[9/16/92 Carter Library processing note: We have found no evidence of a subsequent interview.]